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*The Evils arising from misapply'd
Curiosity.*

A
S E R M O N

Preached before the
UNIVERSITY of OXFORD,
At St. MARY's,

On SUNDAY March 9. 1760.
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By THOMAS GRIFFITH M. A.
Fellow of *Pembroke* College.

Published at the Request of the Vice-Chancellor
and Heads of Houses.

O X F O R D,

Printed at the THEATRE for S. PARKER; and Sold by
J. RIVINGTON in St. Paul's Church-Yard, London.

MDCCLX.

IMPRIMATUR;

JO. BROWNE,

VICE-CAN. OXON.

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ACTS XVII. 21.

*For all the Athenians and Strangers
that were there, spent their Time in
Nothing else, but either to tell or to
hear some new Thing.*

CURIOSITY is a Passion so connect-
ed, or rather so interwoven, with the
Nature of Man, that it is perhaps
impossible to conceive any one en-
tirely divested of it; at least if He was so, it
is certain that He would be in a State little
better than that of an Idiot. Perhaps too it
may be with Truth affirmed, that our natural
Faculties are quick or slow just as there is
more or less of this active Principle in our
Constitutions. It cannot be worth while to
stop one Moment to enquire whether this be
really the Case or not: It will be much more
to the Purpose to observe that in this, as in eve-
ry other Instance, We may see and admire the
great Wisdom and Goodness of God, who
hath implanted in Man such a Passion as may
constantly incite Him to exert his rational
Faculties and to employ them in the Investi-
gation of Truth, and in making great and use-
ful

ful Discoveries. It is this Thirst after Knowledge (for so it may well be called) which gives Life and Activity to Mens Labours in the various Branches of Literature, and which enables Them with Pleasure to make those extensive and painful Researches into Nature, which have so much contributed to the Glory of God, and the Advantages of Mankind.

In this Light considered, the inquisitive Principle I am speaking of is an Ornament and a real Blessing to Man; it leads directly, if it be rightly apply'd, to those Qualifications which form the justest Distinctions amongst Men; it may be look'd upon as the first Mover in the Arts and Sciences, I had almost said, the Parent of every noble Discovery in each Kind of Knowledge.

This Principle however, like all other natural Passions, may be abus'd, and then will be productive of much worse Consequences than at first Sight may be imagin'd; and which, as they may not seem directly and immediately connected with moral Virtue, have for that Reason, perhaps, been less attended to than from their great Importance they deserve to be. They are such as are prejudicial to the Interests of Religion and Learning, such as will not fail indeed to bring Reproach on a People in general, but will more particularly affect the Reputation or the Well-Being of Literary Societies.

One cannot for Instance read without Indignation or Contempt that strange Account recorded in the Text of the once famous City of ATHENS. A City so celebrated for Virtue and Wisdom as to be the Pride and the Boast of the Gentile World. — This was once the Case: But when St. Paul preach'd the Gospel there, the *Athenians* were much sunk in Spirit and Reputation. There were still indeed great Remains of their ancient Learning and Politeness; the Arts and Sciences were cultivated and esteem'd by Them; and a Regard for Decency and Morality was not utterly extinguish'd. The Seeds of Corruption however had been sown and taken deep Root amongst Them. We may fairly conclude from the Text, that their Curiosity was exercis'd on Trifles, their Attention to serious Matters dissipated, and nice Speculations were probably more esteem'd than the most useful Knowledge. — Nothing seems to have pleas'd Them farther than merely as it was new, *They spent their whole Time in Nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new Thing.* One is not therefore to wonder that St. Paul's Preaching should meet with so little Success. They heard Him merely for the Sake of gratifying an idle Curiosity, attending little to the Importance of his Doctrines, or to the Weight of his Argument. — I need not say that after these *Beginnings of Sorrows*, We find *Athens* sinking by slow and almost imperceptible Degrees, till Ignorance, Slavery and Superstition

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had

had succeeded to Learning, Liberty and Wisdom.

It can never be improper to guard Ourselves against those Faults which appear so ridiculous in, and have prov'd so fatal to, other Communities; and I trust it may not be wholly unuseful, if in the ensuing Discourse I endeavour to lay before you some of the Mischiefs that may naturally enough be expected, if

In the *First* Place our Curiosity should degenerate into a busy Pursuit of such Things as are unworthy a Man;

Or if *Secondly*, on the other Hand, it should be employ'd on such Subjects as are above our Reach, or in their own Nature incomprehensible by Us;

Or *Lastly*, if it grow so excessive that Love of Novelty becomes the ruling Passion.

The Discussion of the *first* Point will most naturally lead me to consider Those whose Love of Novelty is applied merely to the Invention of various Amusements. I must not be understood to mean such as are fond of criminal Pleasures. The Words of my Text, and the Nature of my Design, point out another Class who as yet may have some Sense of Duty, some Regard for Religion at the bottom, and more to outward Decency; who mean not to offend tho' They are not solicitous to improve Themselves; in a Word, such as are wholly inactive as to moral or mental Proficiency.

ciency. — A Mistake (and a fatal one it is) hath sometimes prevail'd among the unthinking Part of Mankind, that provided their Pursuits are harmless all is well: Hence Those especially whose superior Fortune may exempt Them from the Business of any particular Profession, have seem'd to think They had a Kind of Privilege to spend their Time in such a Manner as may be most agreeable to their Inclinations, and that They sufficiently discharge their Duty if They do not run into Immorality; if their Diversions are but innocent, there can be no Danger in pursuing them even to Excess. But surely no thinking Man will affect to believe that He was sent into the World merely that He might *take his Pastime therein*: Or that Men of Rank, whose Example will always have most Weight, should, on Account of that Rank, have a Right to be the most insignificant: Or that any Man can innocently spend the greatest Part of that precious Time in Quest of Follies, on the right Use of which no less than his temporal and eternal Interest depends. The Truth is, that tho' those who are employ'd in, or intended for, Professions are more peculiarly oblig'd to labour in their own proper Sphere, and make Themselves thoroughly acquainted with what They undertake; yet no Condition whatever can justify a Man's making those Things the Business of his Life which are calculated only for necessary Relaxation, without incurring the Guilt of that unprofitable Servant who *hid his Talent in the Earth,*

Earth, and was We know on that Account *cast into outer Darknefs where there is Weeping and Gnashing of Teeth*. But this restless Thirst after Follies is not only unjustifiable in itself, but it is attended with a long Train of ill Consequences, which cannot fail to make a worthless and a vicious Character in Life.

For in vain does a Man flatter Himself that He can keep Innocency whilst his Thoughts are intent on mere Amusements. It is morally impossible that *He* should escape the Contagion of bad Example, and the Variety of Temptations that He must encounter, who is continually shifting the Scene from one Diversion to another. It happens unfortunately too, that the very same Disposition which leads Him into Temptation makes Him less able to defend Himself when assaulted by it. If therefore He should escape unsullied by the grossest Vices, it must be owing to some extraordinary good Fortune, or the Providence of God protecting *Him* whom his own Imprudence would otherwise destroy; which however it were Folly and Presumption to hope for. Let Those who, notwithstanding present Gayety, think it of Importance to *work out their own Salvation*, (for to such only I am speaking) reflect a little what Effects a Conduct like this will have on every religious and serious Principle. Now a bare outward Attendance on religious Ordinances, and that too in a careless and perfunctory Manner, can never be thought a sufficient Discharge of our Duty to God — We must

must *keep our Hearts with all Diligence*, and *exercise Ourselves unto Godliness*, if We hope to form such a real Habit of Piety, as may influence our Lives, and be in any Degree acceptable to God. And these Things are not to be done without such Attention, Care and Meditation, as are plainly inconsistent with Levity and Dissipation. A Taste for Pleasure will make a Man incapable of relishing those refined Delights which Religion affords, will make her *Ways* appear irksome tho' they are real *Ways of Pleasantness*; hence will by Degrees arise a thoughtless Indifferency productive of a vain Security, *speaking Peace where there is no Peace*, and stupifying the Mind that She cannot hear, or attend to, the Voice of Conscience which might otherwise remind a Man of his Danger. But neither is this the worst; when the Mind has a forcible Bent toward other Pursuits, They will of Course be uppermost in a Man's Heart, and Religion will have no Place there; nay as it is found to thwart the favorite Passion, Indifferency may probably beget Contempt, and end at last in the *Great Offence*. Those who care not for God, nor accustom Themselves to have him frequently in their Thoughts, will come to a Kind of Practical Atheism, and *live as to all good Purposes as if there was no God in the World*. — Unless (which is not unfrequently the Case) this Love of Novelty and Desire of Entertainment, should lead a Man to the Haunt of some Enthusiast, who perchance
may

may so far work upon his Fancy, that a Judgment weak and uninform'd, destitute of solid and steady Principles, may mistake Noise and Madness for Zeal and Devotion; may be suddenly driven to a religious Phrenzy, embrace fanatic Illusions and Extravagance, instead of *the Words of Truth and Soberness*; be distinguish'd for I know not what Raptures and Transports, instead of the calm and solid Comforts of true Religion. — One or other of these fatal Extremes may naturally be expected from a constant Thirst after Amusements — How far Experience may confirm this Remark, or how far a Fondness for Pleasure and Aversion to serious Thoughts (for which our Age hath been somewhat remarkable) may have contributed to the Increase of Enthusiasm and Infidelity, which seem to be almost dividing the World between them, I shall not pretend to enquire — But shall proceed just to observe that the same Passion will have as ill Effects on every other serious Principle, and make a Man as unfit for the Relative Duties of Life as for the Duties of Religion.

A constant and uniform Principle is as necessary for the Discharge of the one as the other: For tho' a Man may sometimes act Right from natural Disposition or from other Causes; this will be rather accidental good Behaviour than a conscientious Discharge of Duty. To instance in a very obvious Case, that of Friendship: A strict Regard to Honour, a Delicacy of Sentiment, and unshaken Fidelity, are most certainly

certainly necessary to bring it to Perfection. Apply these Things to the Man of Pleasure, and it will be found that He is incapable of them. He may indeed from mere Fancy or Caprice have a fond Attachment for some Person, and may be even lavish in his good Services whilst that Fondness continues. But then his Attachments will be merely as Chance directs; without distinguishing duly whether they be plac'd properly or improperly. And as his Friendships are founded merely on Caprice they will from the same Cause soon be dissolved. Indeed what Fidelity can one expect from a Person whose Life is a Scene of Inconstancy, who is daily changing his Taste for Persons and Things as Fashion or Humour may happen to direct Him?

Again, such an Attention to Amusements is a sure Hindrance to all Improvements of the Mind, an effectual Bar to useful Knowledge. The Mind which is contracted only to the Pursuit of unimportant Matters will be incapable of that laudable Ambition (which every good Man hath or ought to have) of being in some Manner or other useful to the Community. And tho' these Men may wish for some Kind of Learning and Knowledge barely as a desirable Accomplishment, their Reading will be principally directed to Matters of Entertainment: Such perhaps as may give a romantick Turn to the Mind, or tend to inflame the Passions. But supposing that from partial Extracts, or trifling Essays, taken up at what may

be call'd their *leisure* Hours, some superficial Knowledge in various Kinds of Learning may be pick'd up; it will not be such as can *edify*, but such as *puffeth up*; such as will hinder rather than forward useful Researches: For We may ever depend on King Solomon's Remark; *Seest Thou a Man wise in his own Conceit, there is more Hope of a Fool than of Him.* They will necessarily be held in Contempt by the truly learned and sensible Part of Mankind, and must be in a great Measure Strangers to Matters of the greatest Importance to Themselves, their Friends, and the Publick.

There is another Consequence of the Disposition I am speaking of so obvious as scarcely to need Mention, but too pregnant with Mischiefs to be omitted. A constant Pursuit of Diversions is the certain Parent of Extravagance, the Forerunner of Difficulties and Distress, a strong Temptation to Injustice and Dishonesty. But this is not all: In a Place dedicated to Religion and Learning, Extravagance is a Crime so complicated that one knows not how to compute its various Guilt. — In the first Place, it is contrary to our excellent Rules and Constitutions, and that frugal Simplicity which ought to be the Glory of our ATHENS. It poisons by contagious Example; is too often connected with Luxury and Debauchery; and what is surely of great Weight, it is a Kind of sacrilegious Perversion of those Supplies, which have been afforded for Improvement in Wisdom and Virtue, and prostituting them to such Purposes as
 necessa-

necessarily defeat the Ends for which they were bestow'd. *Those Things which were intended for our Wealth have prov'd by this Means unto us the Occasion of Falling.* — Possibly, horrid Cruelty and flagrant Injustice may be added to all this. Aged Parents, or even whole Families, may be distress'd by the Folly and Indiscretion of one who was distinguish'd from the Rest by the Advantages of a liberal Education; and who, one would think, was under the strongest Obligations from Motives of common Gratitude, to have made the Return at least of a prudent and sober Conduct.

II. But it is now Time that I hasten, in the *second* Place, to consider another Kind of Mischief arising from Curiosity misapply'd, and directed to such Objects as are above the Reach of, or utterly incomprehensible by, human Abilities.

That there should be some Limits put to our Curiosity, and that it should not be exercis'd on Things above our Capacities, is as evident as that our Understanding itself is limited, and that there are some Truths which it can never in its present State comprehend by the most painful Enquiry. A Fact which will not be deny'd by those who know, that We cannot understand the secret Operations of Nature in many of those Appearances which are daily before our Eyes. Whenever a Man's Taste leads Him to nice Speculations and curious Disquisitions on such Subjects as are plainly

out of his Reach, his Enquiries can never be satisfactory either to Himself or the World: And such ill-judg'd Curiosity will produce various Kinds of Mischief. — There have been We know those Philosophers who have bestow'd much Labour in Quest of Things impossible in Nature; and who of Course have found no other Reward for their Toil than Loss and Disappointment, Vanity and Vexation. The World is now grown wiser; and those, who have misapply'd their Time and Talents on such fruitless Researches, are justly look'd upon as Objects of Pity or Contempt. However, no other Harm hath accru'd from these Things than the great Inconveniencies which have attended those Persons (and their Followers) who have been engag'd in these vain Enquiries; and who might, with the same Application to proper Subjects, have been beneficial or ornamental to their Country. This will be generally the Case in human Sciences; but in religious-Matters it will be much worse. Angry Controversies and unchristian Railing scarcely ever fail being the Consequence: And the Cause of Infidelity is serv'd by such misplac'd Curiosity.

To begin with Inconveniencies of the slightest Kind: It may be imagin'd that there are some Subjects in holy Writ on which one may innocently or usefully exercise the Fancy; and make such Conjectures as are not disagreeable to, tho' they are not confirm'd by, the Word of God. Thus, for Instance, We are fully assur'd

fur'd from Scripture and most authentick Remains in Nature, that the Waters did once *prevail over the Face of the whole Earth.* —

To account for this Fact on philosophical Principles; to give a mechanical Solution of the Manner in which it was brought about, hath employ'd many ingenious Persons, and perplex'd more; and all to very little Purpose.

For it seems pretty certain that no Theory on this Subject can be satisfactory, or rise higher at most than plausible Conjecture. I would not be understood to censure such Enquiries as this last, or others which might easily be mention'd, as sinful: They may certainly be very innocent; possibly may have their Use, if they should enliven the Imagination, and make it assist Reason in the Duties of Religion. —

But they are to be made within certain Bounds and Restrictions; they must not interfere with Enquiries of more Importance; they must be made with that modest and humble Diffidence which peculiarly becomes Speculations on sacred Subjects, where certain Light cannot be had from God's express Word: And above all, they must be free from unchristian Reflections; they must not be insisted upon as Articles of Faith, but pass merely for what they are, the Conjectures of fallible tho' ingenious Men.

There are other Matters which have been attended with more fatal Consequences: There are some Men who are never so well pleas'd as when They are prying into the Mysteries of Religion. This strange Curiosity hath, amongst

amongst others, produc'd two Evils directly opposite to each other, which have Both done great Prejudice to true Religion. One Set of Men, observing that Reason cannot comprehend some divine Truths which are expressly reveal'd, have hastily concluded that She could do Nothing at all; and have therefore rejected (or seem'd to reject) her Aid in Matters of Religion — Whilst others, observing that Reason is a safe Guide in such Things as are within her Sphere, have as hastily inferr'd that She could attain to every Thing: At least, that They have a Right to reject what She cannot comprehend. Both these Mistakes arise for want of considering with Precision what are the proper Objects of Reason, and confining our Enquiries to Them, and Them only. — Indeed, where these Disputes arise amongst real Christians, one would be apt to suspect that they are owing to some Mistake of each others Meaning. Heat of Controversy may sometimes betray Men into unguarded Expressions. These may be strain'd by the Adversary, and taken in a different Sense from what was intended: It may be, if Things were calmly and impartially consider'd, there would not be so much Diversity in Opinion as there may seem to be: Neither the one nor the other may mean to carry Matters so far into Extremes, as They may be represented to do by Those with whom They are engag'd in Controversy. — But to proceed: Those Men who do really profess to think Reason useless
to

to Religion make Christianity unworthy a rational Creature; and serve, undesignedly perhaps, but very effectually, the Cause of Infidelity. Reason must judge of the external Evidence which supports Revelation. It will do more: It will consider the glorious End and Design of it, the Redemption of Man from Death and Sin to Life and Righteousness. It will consider the general Tendency of it's Doctrines to promote the Safety and Happiness of Society; to make Men wiser and better, by enforcing or rather giving Life to Morality. From all these Things Reason will collect that it is a Dispensation every Way worthy its Author, calculated as it is to bring *Glory to God in the Highest, on Earth Peace, good Will towards Men.*

But if from the united Force of Argument, Reason shall be persuaded that the Revelation is really of God, She must then be oblig'd to receive all that is clearly taught there. It would very ill become Her to censure any Truth which is expressly reveal'd, merely because She cannot comprehend *the hidden Things of God*; much less to endeavour to evade such Truths, and by forc'd Constructions and ill-grounded Criticism to wrest the Sense of the divine Writings merely to accommodate them to our own Capacities, and to gratify that detestable Pride, which would fain be *wise above what is written.* And yet such Things have been done: The most express Truths have been explain'd away by some, who claim a Right of judging

judging of God's *Ways*, which *are past finding out*. Thus, for Instance, there can be Nothing more clear than that the *Son of God was manifested in the Flesh*, and that *He dy'd to put away Sin by the Sacrifice of Himself*: Yet there are Those, who by denying the Divinity and Satisfaction of Christ (in Compliment to their own Notions) have seem'd to be persuading Men that Christianity had taught Them there was no Redeemer.

But the most extraordinary and the most fatal Consequence of all hath been, that the Mysteries of Religion have been pleaded by some as an Argument for rejecting the Whole: Not excepting those Parts which We can easily understand, and from Principles of Reason must admire. This seems to be just as good Sense, if I may be allow'd to borrow an Allusion, as if one was to cut down a fine fair Tree, affording Shelter and bearing Fruit well, merely because from its Loftiness some of its Branches might be out of our Reach.

I would ask, with what Contempt an illiterate Peasant would be treated, who, upon some speculative Truth in human Science being propos'd to Him, should refuse his Assent because He understands not the Demonstration on which it is founded; should despise the Authority of Those who do; — should persist in his Error tho' Conviction were of great Consequence, and have no better Reason to give for his Obstinacy than merely asking *How can these Things be?* If Men would always remember

member one obvious Distinction, that what is above our Reason is not on that Account contrary to Reason, They would not surely fall into such Absurdities.

There is Nothing dark, mysterious, or incomprehensible in the Grounds, Principles or Proof of our Faith. Whatever regards the practical Duty of Man is so plain that *He who runneth may read*. Instead then of embarrassing Ourselves with Matters We cannot comprehend, it will be wiser in Us to apply Ourselves to what will find Us ample Employment: To study to understand God's Word, and diligently to regulate our Faith and Practice according to the Doctrines taught there: Humbly receiving those sublimer Truths in the Words which the Scriptures declare them to Us, solicitous only to know whether they are written. And if they are written, nice Speculations, and Attempts to judge of them by our own weak Understandings, will certainly perplex Us: It is possible, as We have seen, it may lead Us into dangerous and damnable Errors.

III. I am now, in the *last* Place, to consider the Mischiefs that will arise, if Love of Novelty become so excessive as to be the ruling Passion: There are We know Persons in the Literary World, who are so addicted to Variety, as to be perpetually making Transitions from one Author and Subject to another, and as constantly tired before They have gone thro' with their Lucubrations. It is no wonder th

such Men, however busily employ'd, should never make any considerable Proficiency in Learning. So far from getting a general Knowledge in various Branches They can have no clear Insight into any one: They are rather confounded than enlighten'd by such strange Inconstancy. But this is not all. They will from hence have no settl'd Judgment in Things, will *be toss'd to and fro by every Wind of Doctrine*, and probably be of the same Opinion with the last Author that has fallen into their Hands: Or else, finding from such superficial Enquiries no solid Basis on which They may rest Truth, They may fall into the miserable Absurdities of perfect Scepticism.

Or to put the Matter in another Light—Where Nothing pleases unless it be new, Truth and common Sense will often be sacrificed to Novelty; and Nothing is more likely to beget strong Prepossessions in Favour of Absurdities. A strange Kind of Pride commonly steps in, and makes Men ashamed to acknowledge that They have been in an Error; and their Ingenuity is exerted to defend a Cause which at the bottom They are ashamed of, would Pride permit them to own their real Sentiments. Common Sense will tell Us, that in all Matters of Moment our Opinions should be the Result of sound Argument and rational Enquiry. But if in a Way contrary to this, our Opinions are first form'd from Caprice or Fancy, and We are driven to the painful Necessity of finding out some sort of Arguments

to show on a solid foundation that it is

in Support of our Prejudices, I need not surely say that We shall appear ridiculous, or worse. It is diverting enough to reflect on the extravagant Follies which have been warmly contended for in human Sciences, the wild Hypotheses, the fond Conceits, and whimsical Absurdities of Philosophers, which have all had their Admirers, but of Course lost their Credit when they ceas'd to be new, or have vanish'd before Reason and Experiment. These Evils are therefore only temporary — But the Prejudice done to Religion by such a Spirit is more fatal and more lasting.

Supposing a Man of this Turn to sit down to consult the Oracles of God. It will not be so much with a View to improve Himself in divine Knowledge, or to inform Himself of his Duty, as to search for or to support some new Conceit. Criticism (improperly so call'd) not Religion will be his main Object; and his Heart will not be corrected, nor his Judgment improv'd, by his reading the Word of God.

But farther; this Temper hath too much Tendency to Infidelity. Those who have a natural Prejudice against Establishments will never give the Arguments us'd in Support of them their due Weight. They will shut their Eyes against the Truth, and arm Themselves at all Events against Conviction. The Antiquity of Christianity will be a strong Motive (it will scarcely be avow'd as an Argument) for rejecting it. I would not say that all our

Infidelity is owing to this: But thus much is certain, that tho' Christianity hath been attack'd in various Shapes, and hath as constantly been irrefragably defended; tho' Force of Truth hath seem'd to prevail, and the Cavil to be buried in Silence when it ceas'd to be new; yet hath it reviv'd in Time under some new Disguise, and again triumph'd for a while by Force of its Novelty. But supposing Men not to proceed so far as Infidelity; this busy Spirit will prompt Them to plant new Doctrines in the Church of Christ, will assist the Cause of Latitudinarianism, Heresy and Schism; make Men Enemies upon Principle to establish'd Constitutions, and forward to root up Foundations, and to introduce *Confusion and every evil Work*. — I may add by the Way, that the same Principle is equally dangerous to the civil, as it is to the ecclesiastical Polity; the Parent of Faction, Sedition or Rebellion in the State.

It would certainly be too harsh to ascribe the Origin of all those Sects which have bred such Distractions in this Church and Nation, to this perverse Antipathy to receiv'd Doctrines and old Establishments. There can be no Doubt but many honest Men have dissented from the establish'd Church, upon such Motives as appear'd to Them well founded; such as had wrought in Them a Conviction. The Writings of some amongst Them have done Honour to the Christian Cause; and it would be want of Charity to think all such Men insincere,

sincere, tho' We firmly believe them to be mistaken. — But there can be no Doubt again, that designing Men have been concern'd likewise in the first Rise of many of them; and They have ever found their Account best from Those who have *itching Ears*. And one must suspect that the *bearing some new Thing*, has been at least one powerful Means of increasing the Number of their Converts. They have besides, most if not all of Them, one peculiar Advantage in this Respect, that as They have no publick and profess'd Articles of Faith, or Mode of Worship, their Doctrines and their Manner may vary not only in different Ages, but even at the same Period in different Congregations of the same Class of Men. Hence the Taste for Novelty is constantly gratify'd; and an Union by this Means strangely maintain'd, amongst Those who in Truth differ from each other in very essential Points. It may farther be observ'd, that Those are always the most prevalent and fashionable who have most Novelty to recommend Them. — God grant that We may not for this Reason see another dangerous Schism arise in the Church of Christ, from Those, who tho' They still hold Communion with Us seem to be affecting *new Things*, and are drawing whole Multitudes after them to seperate Congregations.

Before I dismiss this Subject, I must desire that I may not be misunderstood, as if I meant to censure such free and fair Enquiries as may
produce

produce useful Discoveries, or throw new Light on any Part of divine Learning : As if I was recommending implicit Obedience to establish'd Doctrines, and blaming all without Distinction, who use their own Reason and Judgment in examining *whether they be of God*. To avow this would favour of Bigotry, and would be in Fact to recommend that very Prejudice in Favour of old Doctrines, which I have been censuring when apply'd to new ones. Such a Prejudice as this (tho' it might, if general, make Men peaceable) would greatly hurt true Religion. It would make Men obstinately persevere in an Error once establish'd, without a Possibility of Reformation. It would make Religion somewhat like Party, where the greatest Merit would be a blind Attachment to some certain Maxims, or determin'd Courses of Action, without knowing (or mistaking) the Principles on which they are founded. I well know that Truth can never be hurt by the most free Enquiry, provided it be fair and candid. All that I would mean is, that there should not be such a Prejudice against our Religion, or any particular Doctrine of it, as may bias Men in their Searches, and incline Them strongly to reject it before They have well examin'd it : That the Grounds of our Faith and our Establishment may be try'd impartially by the Principles of sound Reason : That mere Fancy pass not for Argument, and that no Strefs be laid on a futile Objection merely because it is new :
That

That in searching the Scriptures, genuine and sound Rules of Criticism, built on a Knowledge of the original Languages, be apply'd; and that the wild Excursions of Imagination or Prejudice be not mistaken for solid and judicious Explanations. An Enquiry, thus set about, will never hurt the Cause of the Christian Religion or the establish'd Church (they have often stood the Test of nice Examination) and no farther Prejudice need be desir'd in Favour of either, than such as must be unavoidable; in the former, from the great Improvement it hath actually made in the World by rescuing it from gross Error and Idolatry, and by establishing Morality on a proper Foundation — And in the latter, from her having been so long the Bulwark of the Reformation, and having so successfully repell'd the Assaults of Bigotry and Superstition. A fair and rational Enquiry will be of real Service to Both. The Records on which they are built will be by that Means preserv'd in their full Vigour; and they might otherwise be lost, or become less forcible, from mere Inattention.

I have now, as I propos'd, pointed out some of the Evils arising from the Mis-use of Curiosity: And if they shall appear to be well founded, need I infer the Necessity of our being guarded against them? It is but strict Justice to say, that the salutary Rules and Discipline of this Place are most admirably calculated for this Purpose: The whole Circle of useful Knowledge which is here taught will
afford

afford strong Motives to Men to employ their Curiosity on some worthy Object: The Regularity of our Discipline and stated Hours of Employment seem well adapted to make Men OEconomists of their Time: Care too is taken that the Progress thro' the Sciences should be methodical; lest those, who want Experience, should be lost in wandering thro' various Paths, so as to pursue none to any Advantage. — Need I urge any other Motive for our making Ourselves well acquainted with the Extent and Limits of the human Understanding? Need I recommend it to Those who mean to apply Themselves seriously to mental Improvements, that They consider the Importance of a *certain Method* of Study, lest too many Avocations to different Subjects should defeat the End of all? Need I farther enlarge on the Necessity of dedicating some Time to such Academical Knowledge as may fix the Attention, assist Reason, and correct the Imagination; such as may enable Them to form a Criterion between the Sallies of Fancy and the Deductions of sound Argument?

But as to Those (few I trust) who, neglectful of their better Part, seem to think their proper Business is *to eat and to drink and rise up to play* — Tho' They are not to be argu'd with, They may be exhorted to consider what They were sent into the World for, and the Obligations They are under to *work whilst it is Day, as the Night will soon come when no Man can work.* They may be reminded, that
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the most perfect Knowledge of all the Gayeties and Follies of Life is as Nothing, when compar'd to the slightest Improvement in Wisdom and Virtue, whereby They may become wiser and better. That ingenuous Pride in human Nature may be call'd upon; and They may be ask'd, if it is not wholly below a Man of Sense to aspire no higher than to the Character of an innocent Worthlessness? They may be desir'd to consider how despicable They must appear in the Eyes of the World, and even in their own Estimation, in Comparison of those many truly respectable and illustrious Persons, who by their Diligence, their Learning, and good Conduct, have been Ornaments to these Seats in the Course of their Education; highly useful to their Country in the various Stations of Life They have afterwards been plac'd in. — They may be entreated farther to recollect, that there will come, even in this Life, *Days of Darknests* when their Souls shall say *They have no Pleasure* in these Things. And when that fatal Period arrives, which puts an End to the Vanities and Follies of the World; when old Age deprives Them of a Taste for Amusement, and common Custom makes it ridiculous; how will *They* be able to spend the Evening of their Days with any Comfort, who have stor'd their Mind only with Follies? — They will then sorely regret the Loss of that Time and those Opportunities which are now irrevocably gone: And tho' afraid to die would not even wish to

live on Condition of passing thro' the same
 Scenes of Folly again. — But if all these Things
 affect Them not; if there are still Those who
 study only to *rejoice in the Days of their Youth,*
to let their Hearts cheer Them in the Days of
their Youth, who delight to walk in the Ways
 of *their own Hearts* and in the Sight of *their*
own Eyes; They must, or They ought to know,
 that **FOR ALL THESE THINGS GOD WILL**
BRING THEM INTO JUDGMENT.

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